

## THE ANTIQUITY OF MINE LA MOTTE

There is strong reason to believe that Mine La Motte is not only the oldest lead mine in Missouri but in all probability it is the oldest in the United States. It is so old, in fact, that its exact beginnings are lost in antiquity with its initial date open to conjecture.

It seems relatively certain, however, that by 1714 it was being operated, for in that year Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac, governor of Louisiana, is reputed to have visited its environs in the vain hope of finding silver.

After being disappointed by discovering none on the Illinois side near Kaskaskia where Du Tisme, a practical joker, had falsely reported such mineral to be found.

Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac, who was stationed at Dauphin Island at the mouth of the Pascagoula River near Mobile Bay, had undertaken a long and hard journey to investigate the mining possibilities of Upper Louisiana. So seldom did he grace this territory by his presence that the occasion produced quite a commotion throughout the settlements. It requires no stretch of the imagination to suppose the Madison County lead mine should be named "La Mothe" in honor of the visit he deigned to make it.

Of course, the name today is known as La Motte and not as La Mothe; but in early French grants it appeared as "Mothe." It is logical to suppose this French name at the hands of English pronouncers has suffered alteration even as have other French names in the course of time such as Burton from Baston, Girardeau from Girardot, Valles Mines from Valle's Mine.

It seems erroneous to credit Renault or any member of his mining expedition with the discovery of Mine La Motte. Renault has much to his credit, but this honor cannot be ascribed to him in consideration of the fact that Mine La Motte was in operation before he set foot on the

continent. It fared little better in the grant to the "Company of the West" but when that Company merged in 1719 with the "Company of the Indies", forming the "Royal Company of the Indies", Mine La Motte began to come into its own under the operation of Philippe Renault who prosecuted the mining interests for the Royal Company under a subsidiary division called the "Company of St. Philippe" after his own baptismal name.

This went on for a year when in 1720, the Royal Company as a part of the celebrate Mississippi Bubble, John Law's famous get rich quick scheme, blew up at the same time the rest of the bubble burst, leaving Renault an independent miner on his own hook.

He continued to prosecute his mining interests and in 1723 the French authorities at Kaskaskia granted him "two leagues of ground at the mine called Mine Da M. Mothe, the front looking toward the northeast, the prairie of the said mine making the middle point of the two leagues. Renault profitably operated this mine, together with many others in Washington County, until 1742 when he retired to his native France and again Mine La Motte was without a director.

From that time on until 1803, when Louisiana was ceded to the United States, various leaseholders operated the property with varying success. The mine passed through the hands of Pratte, Fleming, and others until 1869 at which time the Mine La Motte-Lead & Smelting Company was organized.

This company and the property were owned and operated by several men, including Haggard, Leathe, Daugherty and Went-

worth until 1913 when the St. Louis Smelting and Refining Company operated it for about a one-year period. The next year the Missouri Metals acquired the property and this firm had it at the opening of the World War and for a year afterward.

In 1918 during the lead boom days when munitions were so much in demand the Sweetwater Mining Company controlled Mine La Motte, continuing to do so until 1922 when the St. Joseph Lead Company in conjunction with a former operator, the St. Louis Smelting & Refining Company, prospected the domain and on June 4, 1923, the Mine La Motte Corporation was organized under the laws of the State of Missouri.

At the present time, this corporation owns all mineral rights and approximately 4,300 acres of the surface. The remainder of the surface is still owned by the Sweetwater Mining Company which did not relinquish entire control in the 1922 transaction when selling out to its successor.

This is the chronological history of Mine La Motte in a statistical way. There runs a vein of romance along with the veins of mineral. Being old, Mine La Motte does not lack for interesting lore and exciting historical lore.

Its most tragic event occurred on the 7th of April, 1774, when it was the scene of an Indian massacre. Seven persons had gone that day to engage in their usual mining pursuits and all seven were killed by Osage Indians who resented the presence of the palefaces in their St. Francois River hunting grounds. One of the number massacred was Joseph Valle, 20 year old son of Don Francesco Valle, late Commandant of the Ste. Genevieve Post. The others were Jacques Parent, Auguste Chatal and Menard, all Canadians; Dupont, native of France; and an English man named Phillips; and a negro Calise.

The villagers of St. Michael's (now Fredericktown) went out and recovered their dead. From the church records of Ste. Genevieve, it appears that these victims of Indian savagery were later re-interred in 1778 in the Catholic Cemetery at that place. Because of this massacre, many vacated the territory and returned Ste. Genevieve, not caring to brave the barbarity of the resentful Osages.

This was a serious setback to the development of Mine La Motte, but it was not entirely abandoned. Today it is probably in a more complete state of abandonment than at any time in its

active history. Not in operation, it has been made the more desolate by having most of the buildings on the premises torn down, leaving only the chat dumps as reminders of a past that was more than interesting.

The star in its mineral zenith shining brightest is that one telling of service rendered the country in times of stress, for Mine La Motte has the distinction of having supplied ammunition for every war that the United States has ever fought, even helping quell the Indians before the Revolutionary War that white man might wrest the continent from the savage.

And still there is glory about this mine for it is averred that more lead reposes now in its subterranean cavities than has been extracted, regardless of its many years of operation—for Mine La Motte is more than two centuries old and is not yet exhausted.

## MODERN WOMAN

Some day our women astronomers will cease to hide their brilliance from the world and we will begin to know more about them. Now and then a little information does find its way into print, and this is how I learned that for fifty years women have been studying astronomy, collaborating, teaching and observing at the Harvard Observatory. Dr. Annie Jump Cannon, now past 70, is considered one of the world's foremost in this science. Another woman of wide reputation is Dr. Cecilia Payne Gaposchkin of the Harvard Observatory, recently made a member of the American Philosophical Society which was founded by Benjamin Franklin. Dr. Carol Anger Rieke has made important discoveries in the heavens. Other noted astronomers are Miss Antonia Maury, Miss Henriette Leavitt and Miss Margaret Harwood who maintains the observatory at Nantucket.

continent.

In 1717, Mine La Motte was included in the grant France made to the "Company of the West", a firm doing business on a trading basis in the new country. Previous to this time, the mining country had been operated under the liberal Crozat Charter granted by Louis XIV. But, as history knows, Crozat's enterprise proved a dismal failure and nothing came of it as far as Mine La Motte's development was concerned.

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